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**A METHOD FOR ELECTRONICALLY MERGING
DIGITIZED DATA SYSTEM OF GENERATING BILLING
STATEMENTS FOR PUBLISHED ADVERTISING**

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BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

*This application claims benefit of Provisional Application 60/104,538
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The present invention relates to means for creating a billing statement automatically and digitally with attached advertising copy and the published page containing such advertising copy.

Discussion of Related Art

Publishers of periodicals and dailies derive significant revenue from printing advertisements in their publications. Traditionally, the method of billing the advertiser, or customer, for the publication of the customer's advertisement is to send a billing sheet, or statement, listing the date of publication, an advertisement identifier, and the charge for the advertisement. Along with each billing line item is included a copy of the advertisement and a copy of the actual page or pages on which the advertisement was published. These hard copies of the advertisements and page are often called tearsheets. The tearsheets were, in the past, manually created by persons who gathered the physical tearsheets and attached them to the billing statements, resulting in a great expenditure of labor. Also, the billing statement created in this way can become physically bulky and unnecessarily hard to handle and expensive to deliver to the customer.

Therefore, there exists a need to automate this billing process and digitize it to make for easier storage and delivery.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention provides for automated creation, and if desired, removable storage and delivery of billing statements for published advertisements. A method according to the present invention requires that the advertisement copy and the page on which it is published, if different, both be put in a digital document format such as tiff, jpeg or the like; and assigned unique customer, or advertiser, identifiers, such as serial numbers, identifying numbers, unique names, or the like associated with the document. The advertisement copy and the page may contain cross referenced indicators. For example, the information header on the advertisement copy may contain information on its page location, while the page document information header may contain information on each customer having an advertisement thereon.

The advertisement copy and page files of images and their associated information headers are created; whether by original composition on a digital publishing system or through later digitization by scanning or the like; and stored in a first, or first and second publications searchable database. A billing statement application is then overlayed on or interfaced with the publications databases in order to match the unique identifiers of the customers in the statement application to the unique customer identifiers in the publications databases. A search and retrieve command is sent to identify each advertisement and its associated page, within a particular date range and for a particular publication, if the publication database file

structure makes this necessary. Copies of the digital documents representing the published advertisement copy and its associated page are linked, or referenced, to the billing document line items and stored as files within the billing statement application.

The billing statement, with each associated advertisement copy and page image, may then be electronically accessed through the billing statement application and transmitted electronically or stored on removable digital storage media such as diskettes or CD-Roms as desired for permanent record and shipping to the customer.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Fig. 1 is a billing statement document according to the present invention.

Fig. 2 illustrates a computer system for running a billing system according to the present invention.

Fig. 3 illustrates an advertisement, or ad copy, retrievable by the present invention.

Fig. 4 illustrates the publication page on which the advertisement copy appears.

Fig. 5 schematically illustrates the digital billing statement, or invoice of the present invention document.

Fig. 6 schematically illustrates the digital advertisement copy document and information statement.

Fig. 7 schematically illustrates the digital publication page containing the advertisement copy and an information header thereof.

DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Referencing Figs. 1 and 2, a billing statement template 10 is contained in the server of a computer system 12 within a billing statement application 14. The computer system 12 further contains a publication database 16 generally associated with an electronic publishing/composition application 13 for the digital construction of stories, text, pictures, advertisements, and the like making up a publication such as a newspaper or magazine.

As seen in Fig. 3, an advertisement image copy 18 comprising text, pictorial images, and the like; is contained in a digital advertisement document 20 which also contains an information header 22 containing a customer identifier, such as a unique name, number, or the like associated with the customer paying for the publication of the image copy 18.

Referencing Fig. 4, the advertisement image copy 18, when it is to be published, is digitally placed within a page site 24 of a publication, along with other images 26, text files 28, and the like which make up that page 24 of the publication. The page site 24 contains an information header 30 containing such information as the publication name, date, page number, document file identifiers, advertiser customer identifier listings, etc.

Referencing Fig. 5, the billing statement or invoice 10 has a customer identifier 32 which may be the same as a customer identifier 34 in the publication database 16 or the two customer identifiers may be cross referenced in the billing statement application 14.

Referencing Fig. 6, the digital advertisement document 20 contains an information header 22 with all relevant information such as the customer identifier 34 and an advertisement copy serial number 36 identifying the particular image 18 of the advertisement which is preferably a separate file within the advertisement document 20.

Referencing Fig. 7, the page site 24 is a document, or group of cross referenced documents, with an information header 30 detailing the publication number 38, the page number 40, publication date 42, and a list of the customers identifiers 44 for the advertisements placed on that page.

With the information headers as shown in Figs. 6 and 7, a search and retrieve routine can be initiated from the billing statement application 14 for an individual customer by specifying a customer identifier and any qualifying ranges for the billing cycle such as a date range, publication volume numbers, etc. The customer identifiers may be cross matched as necessary between the billing statement application and the publishing application through the use of look up tables, a precompiled and referenced association table or the like. The search will then take place in the publication database either in the advertisement copy information headers database 46 or the page site information headers database 48, or both, depending on how the publication application has allotted the customer identifiers and linked the associated advertisement images between the advertisement copy database and the page site database. Each instance of a customer identifier number "hit", or retrieval, will have an associated advertisement copy number and data identifier associated

